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(When filled in)

Date(s) Tuesday, 26 Feb 80

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief Receptionist

Please provide the following representatives with NFIB conference badges. Their respective agencies have certified their clearances to us.

Time: 1330 Room No. 7E62 Subject: Seminar on Improving National Intelligence Estimates

NIO Chairman: Richard Lehman, Chairman/NIC

DIA/DoD

[redacted]

7

NSC

Dr. Fritz Ermarth

State Dept.

David Mark
John Sylvester

[redacted]

2/26

[redacted]

Please refer questions regarding this meeting to: [redacted]

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MEMORANDUM FOR: RL – for your info [redacted]

The attached papers are background materials for a seminar on improving national intelligence estimates that will be held in the 7E62 conference room from 1330 to 1630 on Tuesday 26 February. The seminar is being put together by [redacted] an NFAC officer now working as a DCI Fellow in OTR's Center for the Study of Intelligence (Art is the author of the first two papers attached). All NIOs are invited to attend the seminar if they wish, as are the members of the SRP and about 20 other officers from the intelligence community who are knowledgeable about or interested in the estimative process.

[redacted] EO/NIC

Date 13 Feb 80

FORM 5-75 101 USE PREVIOUS EDITIONS

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"I suppose that if we in intelligence were one day given three wishes, they would be to know everything, to be believed when we spoke, and...to exercise an influence to the good in the matter of policy."

Sherman Kent (1969)

IMPROVING THE INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE PROCESS

Questions about the validity and utility of National Intelligence Estimates, NIEs, are almost as old as the process itself. Producers of the NIEs have long considered them the premier publication of the Intelligence Community, and the estimates process is regarded by some as the one that most influences national foreign policy. Yet, studies and surveys of the uses of estimates show a remarkable pattern of discontent among NIE consumers. If policy maker criticisms of NIEs as reflected in past and current research are correct, then the NIE is not serving the role set out for it by intelligence.

With the establishment of the National Intelligence Council as a collegial body to prepare and issue NIEs, we are entering what may prove to be a new era in estimative intelligence. In the belief that informed discussion can amplify our appreciation of the estimates process, the Center for the Study of Intelligence is sponsoring a seminar for concerned specialists from within and outside the NIC.

This paper will set out some of the questions to be explored in the seminar session. You will find attached to this memo three articles taken from CONTRA, an internal CIA journal, in which intelligence professionals have set out various views on NIEs. Based on this series and on some experiments conducted informally within the Intelligence School in the CIA Office of Training, we believe it would be useful in the seminar to explore the following areas:

--What role should NIEs play in making foreign policy? Are they playing that role today in an effective way? Has our experience been better or worse in the past? If so, why?

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--Can the Intelligence Community combat consumer biases against estimates? Should it try? Are the criticisms of estimates--identified in the attached articles--valid? Can these biases and criticisms be overcome?

--What is the proper process for preparing an NIE? Are there essential elements common to all?

--Is there an ideal methodology for writing an estimate? Should we seek to find consensus where possible? Is alternative analysis or are other methodologies helpful?

--Is there a way to judge estimates and keep track of successes and failures? Can an evaluation process be established?

A three-hour seminar can only scratch the surface in terms of exploring these issues. The CSI experience shows, nonetheless, that a focused discussion, once begun, may generate its own momentum and that the synergistic effect of such group sessions leads to the development of new ideas about old problems.

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Improving the Intelligence Estimate Process

[redacted]

DCI Fellow, Center for the Study of Intelligence

The National Intelligence Estimate, the premier product of the Intelligence Community, is one of our least used and most ill-regarded products. I am certainly not the first person to discover this. Two major studies done since 1976—one by [redacted] and another by [redacted] came to the same conclusion. One senior intelligence officer has told me that similar complaints were heard as far back as the Allen Dulles era.

With the exception of NIE 11-3/8 *(Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the Late 1980s)*, and perhaps one or two others, NIEs are not used in formulating foreign policy, in making policy decisions, or in implementing those decisions. Nor are they particularly helpful as a warning device or as a means to identify future problems. NIEs often serve only as compendiums of data that policymakers can use as reference material—hardly the role envisioned by the founders of our intelligence system.

Based on several case studies that have led to extensive discussions with policymakers in State, Defense, and the NSC staff, the problems revolve around five key factors:

- NIEs tend to be irrelevant to the problems policymakers are trying to resolve, partly because they do not focus on the operational aspects of problems and partly because they do not explore various policy options in sufficient depth to satisfy policy formulation.

- They are not sufficiently analytical; they tend to be descriptive or packed with data. Often, contrasting views of the same situation are buried in an attempt to achieve a consensus.

- They tend to be conservative in making predictions about the future and imprecise in forecasting trends.

- They do not provide explanations for differing perceptions of events, or arguments about the concluding judgments. Alternatives that might have been discussed are often thrown out before the final papers are presented.

- They provide no new or unique information, but are a rehash of what policymakers already know.

While I can agree with [redacted] and company that some of these criticisms display a certain ignorance of the Intelligence Community and its process and that some of the results of the NIE mechanism, especially in its ability to predict the future, may inevitably be doomed to giving the consumers less than they want, I think it is significant that the same criticisms are still being raised even after several attempts to remedy the situation. Clearly, we have not done enough to make the NIE a more useful tool for the policymaker.

What Policymakers Use

My research and the discussion with policymakers indicate that certain of our publications have considerable impact on the policy process and are being used in the ways envisioned by creators of the Intelligence Community.

[1] "An Assessment of National Foreign Intelligence Production," Intelligence Community Staff Paper, December 1976.

[2] "National Estimate: An Assessment of the Product and the Process," Intelligence Monograph, Center for the Study of Intelligence, April 1977.

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The papers prepared for the formal Policy Review Memoranda (PRM) system centered in the National Security Council. These papers are usually the product of an intelligence working group that is a subgroup of the PRM working group. The intelligence working group is often chaired by an NIO or designee of the DCI and this chairman then attends the policy working group sessions. In many cases the system is much more informal, and intelligence and policy people work together to produce the PRM. Although the intelligence contributions sometimes get lost in the policy papers, their influence is judged to be quite significant, according to those who are heavily involved in the PRM process. These contributions are usually policy relevant and seem to be providing the kinds of materials needed in policy formulation.

The less formal contributions—often in the form of uncoordinated typescripts—that are provided to the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC). These are used by the NSC to make more rapid decisions on foreign policy matters. They often answer specific questions posed by policymakers, but intelligence participants in the SCC—attendance varies according to geographic area, expertise, and other factors—are free to add other material as they see fit. The less formal contributions—some of them given in oral briefings as well as in papers—are also judged to be highly useful and policy relevant by our respondents.

Informal briefings, consultations, and "quick-and-dirty" papers provided to individual policymakers. Consumers have indicated that they find it relatively easy to obtain this kind of support, especially in areas where there are longstanding relationships between policymakers and intelligence production offices, and that they find them extremely useful.

Surprisingly, policymakers had many positive things to say about current intelligence, even though they recognize that this kind of reporting probably does not enter into decisionmaking per se. Although it is quite clear that most policy consumers, especially area specialists, see incoming intelligence traffic at about the same time as intelligence officers, the policymakers say they have little time to do much with the information. They seem to be relying on intelligence analysts to put the material into a conceptual framework or to synthesize bits and pieces to make a complete story. These incremental additions to the knowledge held by policymakers are useful, according to their responses. They feel much the same way about individual pieces of raw intelligence, and they often do not make a distinction between raw human source reporting and finished current intelligence.

Intelligence Gaps

The contributions described above are all entering the policy review and decision process at about the same stage—at the point where those people who make foreign policy are formulating options, wrestling with alternative strategies, or seeking to implement general guidelines in specific cases. At this stage in the policy process, the problems have generally been recognized and the course of events leading to the problem are well known. It appears, from the evidence uncovered so far, that policymakers are generally satisfied with the interagency intelligence process that supports this stage in policy formulation. Policymakers find, however, that there are some serious gaps in the intelligence they need, particularly as to:

- Policy problems that they know exist, but about which they have done little or nothing, either because of low priority or because they do not understand the problem completely.

- Problems policymakers have not yet recognized, but which may require action.

- Problems that do not yet exist, but which can be foreseen with some degree of clarity and which will probably require eventual action.

- Multidisciplinary issues that transcend geographic interests and that are not driven by events.

These are the areas which, traditionally, estimates are designed to address, but the record seems somewhat dismal. These are the gaps that policymakers complain estimates do not fill, and they have been complaining for some time. Since we have been successful in satisfying policymakers' needs in some areas, I suggest that we try to translate these same approaches to those areas where the NIE process has been weak. We have

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done reasonably well in supporting the policy process that revolves around the PRM/SCC system in this administration, and I think the record will probably show that intelligence community support for similar systems in previous administrations is equally successful.

I have several suggestions on how to improve the policy relevance of NIEs:

(1) The NIOs should be, in the first instance, the prime movers in determining what estimates are needed and wanted. They are also in a position to determine what material should be treated in the IIM format. What the NIOs seem to lack is a forum where they can exchange information with each other and can review the demands of their various policy consumers. It is also unclear that NFAC has any way of translating into a coordinated whole the demands expressed by policy consumers. There is considerable evidence that each NIO translates perceived demand for intelligence production—including NIEs and IIMs—as he individually feels best. There should be more effort to determine the end product on an interactive basis.

(2) Having decided to do an NIE, the NIOs usually hold interagency terms of reference meetings to determine the scope of the estimates. I suggest that this meeting should include working-level representatives from those policy offices that have a stake in the estimate and an interest in its outcome. This system—which seems to work so well in the PRM/SCC process—would help ensure that the estimate will touch on those areas policymakers want to know about. I am not suggesting that an interagency combined intelligence-policy working group should be used to inhibit the estimate in any way, nor that policy representatives should have any sort of veto over the proceedings. Rather, I think policy offices should be encouraged to participate in order to be sure the end product will meet their needs. Additional participation by the working-level policy representatives could take place in reviewing interagency inputs or whatever draft is put together, to see that issues are being addressed, but again, no veto would be implied.

(3) The aim of the NIE should not necessarily be to reach an agreed position, but to ensure that the arguments, assumptions, adversary positions, and, if possible, final judgments are laid out clearly for policymakers. Watered down, coordinated positions should be avoided. An effort should be made to describe various aspects of the problem and to present a clear statement about the variables—and the unknowables.

The evidence in my research shows that the influence of intelligence on policymakers is often determined by how it is presented. The impact of an NIE can be increased considerably according to the way it is sold by the NIO to senior policy officials. This may involve giving short briefings—a method judged highly effective by policy people in terms of their ability to retain the material—or discussing the results with senior staffers. In any event, it seems clear that the job is not complete when the NIE is published, but that an after-action effort by the NIO is needed to see that policymakers get the benefit of the interagency effort.

The NIOs must have a mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness and usefulness of the NIE so as to determine the course of future estimates, provide feedback to analysts, and ensure that the estimates are reaching the proper audience. This problem—which may extend throughout the range of NFAC production—can probably best be solved by developing an evaluation mechanism similar to that used by the Directorate of Operations in assessing human source intelligence. Basically, the system involves rather well-organized periodic consultations with policy consumers to find out if the product is "on the mark." NFAC has no such system and probably should develop one if it is properly to assess its own product.[3]

There are some who will argue that an effort to work more closely with policymakers in framing NIEs, in inviting working-level policy officials to participate in the NIE process, and in "selling" NIEs to consumers will somehow destroy the objectivity the Intelligence Community fights to maintain, and for which the independent CIA was created. I disagree. In the course of my research, I have discovered that there is both within CIA and in other parts of the Intelligence Community a pride of professionalism that works against any tendency toward losing objectivity. Those

[3] A forthcoming paper of the author will deal with intelligence production tasking and evaluation.

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of us who have worked closely with our colleagues in INR and DIA recognize that they do suffer pressures from senior officials to "back the party line" on occasion, but that their record of maintaining independent judgments is a good one. After all, CIA officials have also been criticized for failing to take a line contrary to the wishes of the administration in power. I am not suggesting that maintaining objectivity is easy—merely that an accomplished professional in intelligence will try to do so no matter where he or she is employed.

Some people have suggested to me, after hearing about the topic of my research, that I might find out that intelligence has no impact on the policy process at all. The evidence is certainly to the contrary. Still, there is much to be done, and an overhaul of the NIE process to make the impact of NIEs as significant as some of the other products we turn out seems to be long overdue.

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Improving the Intelligence Estimate Process: Continuing the Dialogue * (U)

[redacted]

Assistant Vice Directorate for Estimates, DIA

In his recent article, "Improving the Intelligence Estimate Process" (*Contra*, August 1979) [redacted] summarized comments from policymakers and staffers to the effect that National Intelligence Estimates, with few exceptions, "are not used in formulating foreign policy," "tend to be irrelevant," are "not particularly helpful as a warning device," and "provide no new or unique information but are a rehash of what policymakers already know." He concludes that NIEs are "one of our least used and most ill-regarded products"—the same conclusion, he notes, that two previous assessments of national estimates reached. In his article [redacted] proposed some ways to improve the policy relevance of NIEs.

[redacted] I take issue with his basic conclusion and some of his recommendations, although I strongly support others. But more important, he has opened a dialogue on a highly important question to the Intelligence Community. The National Intelligence Estimate, as [redacted] himself points out, is the community's premier product. If NIEs are as bad as these surveys would have us believe and if they are not relevant to or used by policymakers, it is a matter of serious concern to all of us involved in the process.

A dialogue on the subject should help in clarifying the issues and in assessing criticism and recommendations for improving NIEs. It should also lead to additional suggestions for making the intelligence estimate process more relevant to policymakers. I take a personal interest in this since I work in DIA's Assistant Vice Directorate for Estimates and have been a primary drafter on two national estimative products. So I readily accept [redacted] offer to join in the dialogue, and I strongly encourage others to do so as well.

* [redacted] views and recommendations are his own and do not necessarily represent those of DIA.

General Versus Specific Surveys

I tend to distrust general surveys. I find the more general the survey, the less reliable are its results. The generalized, almost unqualified responses that [redacted] received from policymakers and staffers—and that [redacted] and others received to a lesser extent in their 1977 survey—suggest to me that a "shotgun" approach may have been used. To my mind, asking policymakers generalized questions about the usefulness of NIEs—or of intelligence in general—has inherent dangers that would make me wary of the responses.

Discussions I have had with policymakers have given me some appreciation for the many unknowns and imponderables they have to deal with, even with the best intelligence. We in the intelligence field often share a similar frustration over the incompleteness of our knowledge of events and influencing factors, as well as over the difficulty of forecasting future developments. I suspect that any generalized responses from policymakers to a survey on intelligence usefulness would carry a significant risk of evoking this kind of frustration and therefore result in generally critical responses.

At the risk of appearing defensive, I am convinced that a series of specific surveys of policymakers on the usefulness of particular NIEs dealing with subjects within their realm of responsibility would have led to somewhat different responses and would have led [redacted] to qualify what I believe is an overstated and overgeneralized conclusion that NIEs are "one of our least used and most ill-regarded products." Because of this, I support his proposal to create a mechanism to obtain feedback on specific intelligence estimates and other products from those policymakers who would be expected to make use of that particular product.

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"Policy Problems" Versus "Intelligence Gaps"

My suspicion that some criticism of intelligence from policymakers and staffers reflects a natural frustration over the environment of incomplete knowledge they have to work in is reinforced by the kinds of "intelligence gaps" they identified:

- "Policy problems" they have done little or nothing about because they do not understand the problem completely.
- Problems they have not yet recognized.
- Problems that do not yet exist but can be foreseen.

It is interesting that policymakers considered these "intelligence" gaps. Admittedly there are many ways in which intelligence should be providing insight to policymakers on "policy problems" in terms of estimates of probable courses of action in the foreign countries concerned as well as assessments of foreign attitudes, foreign government policies, likely reactions to US policies, and foreign implications of US policy options. Such intelligence should play an important role in giving policymakers as undistorted a perception as possible of foreign factors so that US policy options are assessed realistically. But the focus of their complaint suggests frustration over their own "policy problems"—not "intelligence gaps."

The additional policymaker criticisms [redacted] reports—that NIEs "do not focus on the operational aspect of problems" and "do not explore various policy options in sufficient depth"—further strengthen my impression that some of their criticism is misdirected. They remind me of a recent article in *US News & World Report* in which presidential advisers "criticized" intelligence. They said that President Carter spent hours reading intelligence on Iran, but they complained that "none of the reports told you what to do." I can imagine policymaker reaction if intelligence did attempt to tell them what to do—or to focus on operational aspects of US policy problems or explore US policy options to any extent beyond the narrow confines of the proper intelligence role.

One key qualification I think should be kept in mind in reading criticism of intelligence is that some policymakers and staffers may be biased against intelligence as "simply rehashing what they already know" and therefore write their own intelligence. In addition, some policymakers, especially those already publicly committed to certain policies, may not welcome intelligence assessments that challenge their facts or assumptions. They might simply discount them as "not balanced" or as "incomplete."

Despite the above reservations on survey methodology and acceptance of criticism at face value, I basically agree with [redacted] and with the essential thrust of criticism that NIEs can and should be made more directly relevant and useful to policymakers and their staffers, and that a closer producer-consumer relationship is essential to do this. I also agree that there should be no reason to fear that a close relationship with policymakers, based on mutual respect for our respective roles, would endanger the objectivity of intelligence producers.

Making NIEs More Relevant

In his article [redacted] made several specific recommendations to make NIEs more relevant to policymakers.

The Role of the National Intelligence Officers
He proposed that the NIOs be the prime movers in determining what estimates are needed and wanted, and what estimates should be treated in the Interagency Intelligence Memorandum format. I agree that the NIO should be the prime mover in drafting NIEs but not the *sole determiner* of what is wanted or needed. That is clearly for the consumers to do—and they should be encouraged to make their needs known. If they do not, it is up to the Intelligence Community as a whole to agree on the proper terms of reference, representing the views of varied consumers. This would be done under the aegis of the appropriate NIO. As valuable as the NIO system is as adviser to the DCI, principal point of contact for national-level consumers, and primary community coordinator, I do not think there would be much acceptance within the Intelligence Community to giving an NIO a veto over whether an estimate will be written or not, and what its content should be. If a major dispute arose, I would expect NFIB principals to go over the NIO's head to the DCI, who is the final arbiter.

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Nor should the NIOs be the sole determiners of whether an NIE or IIM format will be used. My personal experience suggests that some NIOs tend to prefer the IIM over the NIE format because the NIE process is a little more involved. One reason NIEs may have a bad reputation may be that many more IIMs are now being published than NIEs. As a result, a survey dealing only with NIEs might present a limited picture of interagency intelligence production. What we need are explicit criteria as to what subject matter should be published as NIEs, SNIEs, and IIMs so that the decision is based on generally recognized principles.

Involvement of Policymakers in NIE Terms of Reference Meetings

[redacted] suggestion that working-level representatives from policy offices participate in terms of reference meetings on NIEs is already in effect to some extent, although to my knowledge it has never been institutionalized. In addition, the intelligence representatives from DIA, State INR, and Treasury routinely coordinate draft terms of reference with policy and operations offices within their respective agencies and present their particular consumers' interest during terms of reference meetings. But I agree in principle that the more involved policymakers are in preparing terms of reference, the more relevant the estimate should be to them—even if the final intelligence judgments are not what they would like to receive. By bringing them more into the terms of reference process, we may also further encourage policy offices to seek intelligence early in the policy formulation process when it should have its greatest usefulness. It might also help them communicate their needs more specifically and effectively.

Meetings Among NIOs

[redacted] suggests that NIOs meet together more often. NIO meetings are obviously useful, but I would be more interested in having the NIOs hold more frequent meetings with Intelligence Community representatives and consumers to keep abreast of the priorities and interests of the community and national-level consumer. The longstanding tradition instituted by [redacted] and carried on by his successors of holding monthly meetings of community representatives is a good model for bringing intelligence producers together to discuss common problems. Policymakers are often invited to these meetings for producer-consumer dialogue. Such meetings prove most effective when they focus on specific geographical or functional areas. The current monthly "warning" meetings are another step in the right direction.

Similar producer-consumer meetings by other NIOs would presumably be equally productive. Such discussions with policymakers may also enable both producers and consumers to appreciate each others' respective roles more. Consumers sometimes undervalue intelligence and need to be shown how intelligence can help them. Intelligence producers sometimes forget that intelligence is only one of many factors going into the policymaking process. While it ensures that policymakers know the foreign facts and implications involved, it will not always be the crucial factor in policy decisions. Our human rights stance is a good example of a policy in which a principle took precedence over intelligence warnings regarding probable foreign reactions and implications. That did not mean, however, that intelligence was "irrelevant" or not considered in formulating that policy.

Identifying Differing Views and Avoiding "Watered-Down" Judgments in NIEs

My experience with NIOs has shown a generally positive attitude toward these longstanding principles, although it is always useful to reaffirm their importance. It is, however, up to the agency representatives, if they do not fully agree with the views expressed, to submit parallel text to state and explain their different judgment.

There is also another side to this question. Although there is usually a strong effort to reach consensus at interagency meetings, making accommodations does not always mean "watering down" judgments. I think most people involved in those discussions would agree that part of the value of the coordinating process is in identifying the evidence and rationale for the views presented and thrashing out the pros and cons of particular judgments. It is a healthy process. The end result may be to identify legitimate differences in judgment that are—and should be—identified in parallel text. At times, however, another equally proper result may be simply an agreement that extreme, oversimplified judgments in the original draft

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would be rephrased in a more carefully worded and generally acceptable way—which to my mind is not "watering down." Actual "watering down" to achieve a "consensus" should always be avoided.

A Summary of Recommendations

To promote further dialogue, I submit the following list summarizing recommendations I would make to improve the national intelligence estimate process:

- Intelligence producer-consumer dialogues should be scheduled on a periodic basis under the aegis of NIOs to discuss consumer needs and intelligence capabilities to support them. These discussions should be on specific geographical and functional areas, rather than general in nature.
- Policymakers and their senior staffers should constantly be encouraged to request NIEs, SNIEs, and other Intelligence Community inputs during the early phases of policy considerations.
- Orientation visits should be scheduled for new policymakers and their staffers to introduce them to the role, capabilities, and value of the Intelligence Community.
- Policy staffers should be encouraged to become more involved in the formulation of terms of reference for NIEs and other intelligence products to ensure that the estimates cover issues that need to be addressed and to help them communicate their requirements more effectively.
- Policymakers and staffers should be encouraged to invite intelligence representatives to their initial discussions on policy-related issues so that areas of intelligence input can be identified.
- A more deliberate effort is needed to include sections or annexes in NIEs on issues of direct interest and use to policymakers.
- Experts from other intelligence agencies should continue to be called upon by NIOs as principal drafters and for contributions to NIEs and other interagency intelligence products.
- Channels of feedback from various levels of consumers should be institutionalized and officially encouraged as one means of enhancing production quality control.
- Post mortems of NIEs should be held, to include both producers and policymakers—not for "Monday morning quarterbacking" but to assess lessons to be learned as a means of sharpening analytical estimative techniques.
- Surveys of the usefulness of NIEs and other major intelligence products should be made, focusing on individual estimates and querying those policymakers and staffers who would be expected to have made use of those products. Suggestions for improvement should be specifically encouraged.
- Criticisms—as well as praise—should be assessed for their validity and not be taken at face value.
- When time permits, more NIO and NFAC assessments written for policymakers should be coordinated within the Intelligence Community and published as NIEs or other interagency products. (Recipients of NIO-originated assessments might naturally assume that they are community-coordinated documents. They often are not.)
- When time permits, drafters of NIEs should travel to the countries assessed in the estimate to discuss the draft with the appropriate US Embassy staff members.
- Increased liaison should be maintained with the academic community, to include more frequent joint intelligence-academic seminars on issues relevant to intelligence production.
- Analyst suggestions should be encouraged on research projects (for example, on perception/misperception and studies of foreign value systems) and new approaches that might be undertaken to improve the intelligence product.
- Experimentation with advanced analytical methodologies and new means of "packaging" and presenting intelligence should be further encouraged.
- Continuation of such dialogues as this one to seek ways to improve the intelligence estimate process should be officially endorsed and promoted.

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More on Improving the Intelligence Estimate Process

Unhappily [redacted] (in *Contra*, August 1979) has made a brief but convincing case that National Intelligence Estimates are one of our "least used and most ill-regarded products." And he has made a number of very sensible—and I would say practical—suggestions about what might be done to improve both the NIEs and their reception in the policymaking community. Perhaps a review of some of the background and origins of the NIEs' problems would help to flesh out the indictment and persuade the powers. that be that [redacted] ecommendations deserve serious—and immediate—attention.

- The most obvious shortcoming of many NIEs is the lack of good current information on the subject under review. Even though the problem here lies mainly with the collectors (assuming that the data desired are in fact collectible), a measure of responsibility also lies with the estimators, whose needs should be clearly expressed in the NIE terms of reference or elsewhere.** And someone (the NIO probably) should make certain that these same expressed needs are seen and *acted on* by the collectors. The trouble is that the system has only rarely worked in the manner intended. Curiously, this has more often been the fault of those with needs than those potentially in a position to satisfy them.
- Another familiar problem is the existence of information denied the authors of estimates. This most often consists of closely held policy matters (private-channel communications from ambassadors, Washington conversations with, say, Soviet diplomats and the like) but also includes data held to be of only military or clandestine service operational interest. Some of this material is of legitimate interest to intelligence officers, and the effort to smoke it out should be pursued vigorously by the highest authorities.
- Some information and some judgments are known to be unpopular with the policymakers and are, accordingly, neglected, ignored, or buried in intelligence papers, including estimates. Direct pressure on the community to handle sensitive issues with great care is relatively rare—though not unknown—but is hardly surprising. In a prudent bureaucracy, a certain amount of understandable self-censorship is hardly uncommon. (The most notorious instance of this was the decision years ago—in the face of contrary public views announced by high-level US officials—to withhold the conclusion of an NIE that the USSR was not at that time building a first-strike capability.) But such self-censorship is ultimately self-defeating.
- Similarly, some information is not collected, because doing so would prove to be unpopular with the policymakers. Efforts to mount full-scale intelligence-gathering operations in countries closely allied with the United States, for example, are rare even when the need—as in [redacted] and, not so very long ago, Iran—is unquestionably clear and present. This is the fear (the administration's, the State Department's, the Pentagon's) that such operations, if exposed, would jeopardize the US position. This concern is legitimate, but it is often overdone and should in any case be recalled by policymakers when a lack of information ultimately proves to be at least as embarrassing as the previously feared exposure.
- Other alleged weaknesses (those identified explicitly by policymakers, as reported by [redacted] are that NIEs are too data-packed and insufficiently analytical; are overly conservative in making predictions; do not provide explanations for differing perceptions of events or arguments about the concluding judgments; and provide no new or unique information.

[redacted] currently an NFAC consultant, was one of the chiefs of the Soviet estimates staff of the former Office of National Estimates.

** A device long ago discarded was the USIB-sanctioned addendum to each NIE that discussed gaps in information, with a mind to remedying these gaps (and with the intention of calling attention to the NIE's substantive weaknesses as well). Perhaps this device should be resurrected.

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Some of these charges are in part inaccurate or simply reflect the desires of readers: many papers, highly analytical in emphasis, have met the reaction. "Just give us the facts, we'll make the judgments." Many less-than-conservative judgments—those that depart from conventional wisdom—have been ignored or criticized by policymakers who believe that they are too "controversial" or "too wild" or who simply disagree with them. And "new or unique information" is rare principally because policymakers—at their own wholly justifiable insistence—are privy to exactly the same information as intelligence officers and not infrequently, as mentioned above, are aware of information denied the Intelligence Community.

- Still, as [redacted] suggests, there is enough substance to these charges to merit soul-searching. Alternatives, arguments, explanations for differing points of view are often erroneously deemed superfluous by drafters and reviewers who have forgotten that the reader may not have been exposed to them within his own perhaps constricted world. As [redacted] suggests, the bureaucratic inclination of drafters and chairman alike to seek consensus and to avoid dissenting footnotes is especially pernicious. There is no better way to strip an estimate of its meaning than the search for judgmental conformity, no better way to dim the lights than to shade them with platitudes and qualifiers.

Many of the shortcomings of National Intelligence Estimates are not substantive, in the manner of those decried above, but are almost entirely procedural. All of [redacted] suggestions on how to improve the policy relevance and impact of NIEs are procedural in character. While all of his suggestions seem eminently worthwhile, even vital, we could perhaps add one or two more: only so many NIEs should be produced each year—too many dilute the currency, but too few (as may have been the case in recent years) weaken demand ("What the hell is *this*?" cries a consumer, peering with puzzlement at an unfamiliar blue cover lying atop the mountain in his in box). No one can establish an optimum quantity—too much depends on events. But the minimum number should be around 20-25; the range of subjects should be broad, not confined to the best selling military papers; crises should always bring forth timely SNIEs, personally pressed and "marketed" by the DCI; and while NIEs should be close to policy concerns, as [redacted] argues, they should never be subordinate to policy considerations.

Finally, it can be said that NIEs are not likely to be any better than the people who produce them. Present catch-as-catch-can procedures hardly suffice. The latter-day notion that superior papers can be turned out by officers whose principal functions lie elsewhere—that is, by temporary "estimators" who may lack interest, experience, and drafting abilities—is a strange one, and the recent record can only testify to its peculiarity. Implicit in the oft expressed complaint that in its later years the ONE Staff had declined in quality was the recognition that the old ONE Staff had performed its demanding duties—drafting estimates—in an at least adequate fashion. The production of NIEs—"the premier product of the Intelligence Community," [redacted] says—is, after all, as much the task of dedicated professionals as any other product of that community. This, then, is the principal recommendation I would make: reestablish a small corps of full-time estimators to support a collegial body of senior "wise men" who initiate, review, amend, and above all "push" the ultimate product.

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